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## THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY

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### IF I COULD AFFORD A MISSIONARY

By Elizabeth Coleman

What fun it would be choosing him! Degrees would not matter much. If Johns Hopkins can have a degreeless dean, why not a degreeless missionary? Probably better not yet. But grant him *some* college and *some* religious experience, and my own examinations would begin.

The first test would be to expose him to a delightful and distinguished person from the country to which I wished him to go—their ambassador or consul—and see how he reacted to this cultured representative from another land. Not long ago a Japanese councilor told me of inviting two prospective missionaries for Japan to dine with him. In commenting on the evening, he said, "I did not find that they had one single thing to give, and they did not know enough about Japan even to ask intelligent questions." My missionary would have to pass with a different report. He must be ready to listen, quick to understand, and anxious for suggestions.

#### The Culture Test

If he passed the critical eye of Mr. Cultured Oriental, I would take him to the best available exhibition of the art of the country to which he was going. Statues would make a good test. Would he say, "Idols"? If he did, unless I could help him to see, "In the elder days of art, builders wrought with greatest care, each minute and unseen part—for the gods see everywhere," he could not go for me. He might be a good man but not big enough. He need not know the principles of art to respond to beauty as it has been expressed in carvings, and pictures and shrines, and so be able to learn and understand more. But if all of it was to him "crazy," then he would not have the understanding heart which my missionary must have.

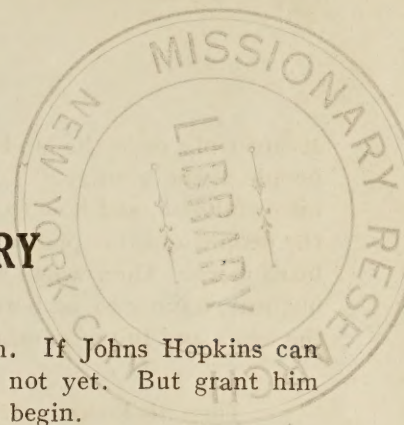
The third test would be of his manners. I would ask my most sophisticated friend to invite my candidate to her home. Let him be a guest at her most delightful dinners and teas, see how he fitted into a home of refinement. Whether he knew enough to write her a note when he left, whether he was a "gentleman" under all circumstances. If he had had little social training in the way of the world, whether he had the quick eye to note the small things which are the pleasant amenities of life. For if in my friend's luxurious home he could not fit in with new social standards, how could he be able in another civilization, to find adjustments to its differing requirements, which are after all so important?

#### Travel Trained

Then suppose my university trained, called-by-the-name-of-Jesus candidate, can pass the cultured oriental, has the understanding spirit which reveals itself in appreciation of art and culture, and the social graces to make him at home in the homes of either the rich or the poor and acceptable anywhere—what would I want next? Some real education to reduce his America and add plus to his world. I would send him to his new place of living (notice I did not say work or field) by the longest possible route. If he were going to China or Japan, I would send him by way of Europe and so rub off some of the corners before he got to the orient. Missionaries have criticized many things in the orient because they had not seen the manners and customs of Europe. Many a sarcastic remark at differences of customs would never be made if one had known life in France or Italy. This long leisurely voyage would be a sort of postgraduate course for my missionary. Everywhere, in every land, I would want him to meet the *best* people of the country. The art galleries of Europe would be enriching background for the orient, the gardens would give him standards for comparison, the worship of churches would reveal to him the great spirit underlying differences of form.

When he arrived, what next?

First of all, I would want my most delightful friend in the new country to talk with him about suitable manners, take him to see the most interesting and delightful things, and arrange for him to meet all the people he could. The first three months I would like him to go about leisurely to see the





greatest places in the land, and the most beautiful spots and temples, loved for centuries by the people of the country. To roam about in the country, enjoy the shops, find out what he needed for his own home, and how to shop. Orientate himself, not trying to do anything, but learning to enjoy the people and the place. Of course he would learn some words, and find how much he wanted to learn more. Then when he made his home and began on the language it would not be an awful bugbear, having to be borne, but a delightful privilege, to be enjoyed as a great new adventure into the heart and life of another people.

### **My Missionary's Work**

Then his home. Of course my missionary must have a *wife*, not a salaried worker, who would be a real home-maker. I would not care whether my missionary ever taught a class or preached a sermon, or wrote a book. All I would ask of him would be that he would have a home with a wide open door, where day after day all sorts and conditions of men met and found it easy to share the really great things of life. My Quaker thought of sacrament as being celebrated every time we meet about the table would be his thought, whether he was a Quaker or not, and every meal would be a sharing of life.

Of course he would probably find the friends he made asking for a class where he would teach them or talk over with them the things they would know he believed. How naturally even one's pictures on the walls can bring such a request. But the *one* thing I would ask of my missionary would be that his home should be of "the order of the home of Jesus." His books, and his pictures and his magazines, more than almost anything on his tea table, would all be equipment for the work I would want him to do. "Come in to tea" should be an everyday invitation. His guest would soon find out that the tea was not the important thing, but only the sharing of enriching thoughts and experiences. How much harder than to teach a Bible class it is to have an afternoon tea which is more than food for the body! In the class people come knowing what it is to be, and the teacher has everything his way. But over the tea cups, if the talk is not to be trivial chatter worth nothing but for the moment, what thought—and prayer—it will take.

How well I remember a home in Tokyo, and how entrance into it enriched life! It did not need the tiny shrine to make you know the heart of the home was a *real* shrine. Life was always bigger and finer when you came away. Here racial and national characteristics were not puzzling problems, but enriching experiences in brotherhood. So would my missionary home be. "All my thoughts have changed since I began to come to your home," would be heard over and over again in his home. There would never be any dividing of foreigner and oriental—all would be friends.

### **Sharing**

I would hope it would not take my missionary long to reach the spirit of understanding where some one of the religion of the country would share with him the best of his own religious experiences—different as it might be. To enter the shrine in some home, and have the host, with reverent voice, tell what it meant to him to go there morning after morning for prayer and meditation, before going down to his day's work at the office, would make my missionary think carefully how much he had to add to an experience like that.

I would not want my missionary to be too young—he would probably then be too intolerant, too sure of his own country and his own way of life. But young enough to find different experiences and new friendships marvelous adventures.

And of course I would not ask his wife to make bricks without straw. Unlimited hospitality costs money as well as strength, and she must have the actual dollars to make it possible, and the books and magazines will have foreign postage added, and so my missionary must have money enough for *life*, not mere living.

There would be no reports. Only now and then he would send me some stories of the things that were interesting him, of the hospitality he was giving. And if he felt I was understanding he would sometimes let me share a glimpse with him into the hearts of the new friends he was making.